

determined suitably by table tests, for example. In general, the addition amount of the masking agent may be 0.1 to 10 wt%, preferably 0.1 to 5.0 wt% with respect to the object whose flavor or odor should be masked. For example, as shown in Examples to be  
5 mentioned later, the addition amount with which sufficient effect will be obtained may be 0.5 to 2.5 wt% with respect to a 30% bitter gourd solution, 0.5 to 1.9 wt% with respect to soya milk, 0.1 to 0.4 wt% with respect to a 20-fold dilution of fish sauce, 1.0 to 5.0 wt% with respect to an emulsion containing 23% DHA, 0.5 to 3.0 wt%  
10 with respect to grated garlic, and regarding old rice, 0.1 to 2.0 wt% with respect to water added to cook the old rice.

The masking agent according to the present invention is applicable to the masking of flavor and/or odor of various oral ingestible product. The flavor signifies bitterness, astringency,  
15 pungency, sourness and the like. The odor signifies odors of soybean, fish, vegetable, old rice, konjak jelly, vitamin, retort-pouched food, animal meat, powdered milk and the like. Examples of the oral ingestible product to which the masking agent of the invention is applicable include: foods such as bitter gourd,  
20 grated Japanese radish, vinegar, pickled Ume, lemon, soya milk, soybean protein, fish sauce, dried bonito shavings, vegetable juice, tomato juice, garlic, old rice, konjak jelly, animal meats (e.g., mutton, beef, beef organ meat, pork, pork organ meat and chicken); favorite foods such as horseradish, hot pepper, beer and  
25 the like; food additives such as magnesium chloride, DHA and the like; nutrients or health foods such as propolis, agaricus and Chlorella; vitamins such as vitamin B group; food additives such as powdered skim milk and WPC; and so-called retort-pouched foods. The flavor and odor and the oral ingestible product having

such flavor and odor are not limited to those described above.

#### Best Mode for Carrying Out the Invention

In the following examples, explained are various oral  
5 ingestible product added with the gluconic acid salt and evaluation  
of an effect of the gluconic acid salt on reduction of flavor or odor  
thereof. However, the present invention is not limited thereto.

The evaluation of the masking of the flavor or odor was  
carried out in accordance with the following manner unless  
10 particularly mentioned.

Specimens prepared by adding the masking agent were  
subjected to an organoleptic test by 10 examinees under the  
evaluation basis described below. Results of the evaluation are  
expressed as an average of values obtained from all the examinees.  
15 The addition amount of the masking agent is indicated by wt%.

#### Evaluation basis

0: particular flavor or odor that should be masked is not perceived  
at all

1: particular flavor or odor that should be masked is slightly  
20 perceived

2: particular flavor or odor that should be masked is perceived

3: particular flavor or odor that should be masked is considerably  
perceived

#### 25 Example 1 Reduction of bitterness

##### (1) Bitter gourd

Specimens were prepared by adding 0 to 3 % of sodium  
gluconate (GNA) to bitter gourd drink commercialized by Okinawa  
Pokka Corporation (containing 30 % bitter gourd juice, ingredients:

bitter gourd juice, high fructose corn syrup, lemon juice, honey, acidifier, coloring agents (safflower yellow, gardenia), stabilizer (pectin), flavoring agent, vitamin C). The specimens were subjected to an organoleptic test to evaluate reduction of bitterness.

Table 1

Addition amount of GNA (%)	0	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0	2.5	3.0
Evaluation results	3	2.5	2.1	0.8	0.6	0.2	0

As shown in Table 1, the addition of GNA to the bitter gourd drink remarkably reduced the bitterness particular to the bitter gourd. The bitterness was not perceived at all when 3% of GNA was added.

## (2) Propolis

2 mL of a propolis solution, commercialized by Mannan Foods Co., Ltd. (originally from China), was mixed with distilled 400 mL of water to prepare samples. To the samples, 0 to 3 % of GNA was added to obtain specimens. The specimens were subjected to the organoleptic test to evaluate reduction of bitterness.

Table 2

Addition amount of GNA (%)	0	0.5	1.0	2.0	3.0
Evaluation results	3	2.6	2.1	1.8	1.1

As shown in Table 2, the bitterness particular to the propolis was reduced by the addition of GNA.